



How to Prevent Jet Lag

TRAVEL FACTS

Jet lag is caused by an upset of the body's circadian rhythms. This is the internal clock that tells you when to sleep, eat and be active. When you travel by air, everyone at your destination is on one schedule while you, thanks to the speed of jet travel, are still "lagging" behind on another. The more time zones you skip, the worse the effects of jet lag.

"Traveler's hangover," characterized by headache, dizziness, fatigue and digestive upset, has long been considered a necessary evil of long-distance flights. It doesn't have to be because there are many ways to minimize this physical distress.

Start shifting your sleep-wake cycle to match that of your destination several days before departure, changing at the rate of one hour per day. Try to choose flights that arrive as close to night as possible. Then, as soon as you board the plane start by resetting your clock mentally and physically:

- Change your watch to the time it is at your destination.
- When it's night at your destination, go to sleep. Earplugs, headphones and eye masks can help diminish noise and light. If possible, avoid taking motion-sickness medications or sleeping pills, which aggravate jet lag.
- Stay awake on the plane when it is daytime at your destination. Keep the window shades open, the light on, read a good book, or watch the movie.
- When it's mealtime at your destination, eat, but do so sparingly. Airline meals that are high in fat, salt and cholesterol will make you feel bloated. If possible, choose a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet during your flight. You can request a heart-healthy or vegetarian meal when you buy your ticket. If necessary, take along carbohydrate snacks from home in case the mealtime is not in sync with the aircraft service.

Next, exercise to promote circulation and stay limber. While seated you can stretch your arms overhead, gently stretch your neck, exercise your hands, raise and lower your legs, and bend over and touch your ankles. Additionally, choose the right beverages:

- Drink water. Aircraft cabin humidity is very low. To avoid dehydration, drink 8 ounces of water for every hour you're in the air.
- Avoid alcohol, which adds to dehydration.
- Avoid caffeine, which is a diuretic and can interfere with sleep.

When you arrive at your destination, go outside during daylight hours to acclimate your body to the new light-dark schedule. If you arrive at night, go straight to bed and try to get seven or eight hours of sleep. If

you arrive in the daytime, stay awake until a reasonable local bedtime. Regulate your eating to the local times. If you arrive in the morning, have a high-protein breakfast for energy.

If you absolutely must hit the ground running at your destination, consider the approach used by Olympic athletes when they travel - the anti-jet-lag diet (available at www.netlib.org/misc/jet-lag-diet) created in 1982 by the Argonne National Laboratory, one of the U.S. Department of Energy's research centers. This diet is based on the theory that different foods cause different bodily reactions, including sleepiness. The feast-and-fast regimen starts three days before departure:

On Day 1, feast on a high-protein breakfast and lunch (meat, eggs, fish, dairy products and legumes) and a dinner loaded with carbohydrates (pasta, bread, rice and potatoes). Limit any consumption of caffeine to between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.

On Day 2, fast with light meals of fruit, soup or salad. Limit caffeine to between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.

On Day 3, feast again (same diet as on Day 1).

On Day 4, the day of departure, fast again until it's breakfast time at your destination. End the fast with a high-protein breakfast.

The Argonne diet requires some effort and discipline - cheating greatly affects its efficacy - but it is the most scientific and comprehensive approach to making sure you're in top form when your feet hit terra firma again, wherever that may be.

Once you arrive at your destination, if you are still feeling overtired, be sure to avoid driving, especially in an unfamiliar place.